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ABSTRACT

Trained, indigenous, bilingual people conducted interviews with 172 Mexican American families from the Southmost area of Brownsville and rural communities in Brooks County, Texas, to ascertain metro-nonmetro community satisfaction, as determined by place of residence and age status differentiations among family members. Complete family study units (138 qualified) consisted of interviews with the husband, wife, and one teenager (all in same household), with one parent being Mexican American. Data on 11 Brooks County families were excluded for a special study. Metro and nonmetro adults were generally more satisfied than youth regarding community satisfaction. Generational differences were also indicated in desired size of place preferences, with youth having a greater desire for urban living, while adults chose rural residence locations. Most aspects of the local community were perceived in a positive or satisfactory manner, particularly by adults. Recreational opportunities, jobs, housing, and crime were the focus of some dissatisfaction. Thus, simplistic notions or generalized assumptions about place of residence or generational variation among minority groups did not adequately relate to the complexity and dissimilarity existing in local communities; to understand these aspects more fully, more precise notions of how minority group members perceive these aspects must be developed. (AN)

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SELF-DEFINED COMMUNITY SATISFACTIONS
OF MEXICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES IN
METROPOLITAN AND NONMETROPOLITAN SOUTH
TEXAS: AGE STATUS AND PLACE OF
RESIDENCE COMPARISONS

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SELF - DEFINED COMMUNITY SATISFACTIONS OF MEXICAN
AMERICAN FAMILIES IN METROPOLITAN AND
NONMETROPOLITAN SOUTH TEXAS: AGE
STATUS AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE COMPARISONS

Attempts to assess quality of life have included both objective and subjective dimensions in which individuals self-define their evaluation of life quality. Bert et. al., (1978) note that this process of individual conceptualization involves the internalization and interrelation of perceptions of well-being. The composite structure of well-being combines, affect and satisfaction with environment or place of residence together with age status orientations.

The interactive nature of man with larger social units, society and culture for example, points out the significance of experience and related culture for attitudes and belief systems on which well-being is defined (Altman, 1973). The complexity of this process for the individual or family is far more complex than we have previously believed, especially as it pertains to racial and ethnic subcultural groups. Hicks (1977) has examined the assumption of sociological studies of ethnic and minority groups that conceptualizes such units as internally organized, cohesive social entities, while simultaneously confusing aspects of group formation with that of a social category. In effect, we tend to reify the connotations of group for diverse, heterogeneous social categories, mistakenly calling ethnic categories --- ethnic groups. As Kuvlesky (1979:17) contends, "When we speak of Mexican Americans in the United States we are referring to an "ethnic category" within the larger population: a category of people sharing a common sense of historical origin or treated by others as having a common historical origin." It is hard to conceive that all

members of this category (Mexican Americans) share a common "Mexican American subculture," although some textbooks in the discipline still characterize interethnic relations as relatively well defined, cohesive, organized groups.

Even within local areas assumed to be highly intergated and internally organized, the diversity and variation in values and life orientations can be striking. Miller and Maril (1979) reported that the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas is distinctive in terms of its extreme poverty, yet reactions to that poverty varies widely by length of residence in this country (i.e. generations). Succeeding generations tend to vary in the extent of their assimilation and with the extend to which their sociocultural frame of reference reflects current residence (Dworkin, 1965; Wright, Salinas, and Kuvlesky, 1973; Stoddard, 1978).

Aside from length of residence, place of residence has been a primary focus of quality of life researchers. Size of community and its metropolitan or nonmetropolitan environment are of key importance for our understanding of ethnic inter and intra group relations, particularly for assessing the following:

- 1) Relationship of subculture to larger society
- 2) Nature of the local community
- 3) Family orientations and perspectives
- 4) Individual beliefs and values (Kutner, 1975)

A matter of central concern for such research is how such community aspects of place of residence impact on individuals and families. "The community is the entity which encompasses perhaps the greatest variety of characteristics which impact upon day-to-day life experiences of individu-

als and families" (Metzen, et. al., 1980:6). It is therefore apparent that residence within a metropolitan or nonmetropolitan community may well be a major factor in exploring life satisfaction variables.

The Study

The focus of this paper is on place of residence as a dimension of community satisfaction among Mexican American family members in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties in South Texas. The Southmost area of Brownsville, located in Cameron County, Texas was chosen as the metropolitan component of the study while several communities in Brooks County, Texas constitute the nonmetropolitan study site. Southmost is part of the Brownsville, Texas - Matamoros, Mexico metropolitan area and is distinctly urban in character. Brooks County is largely rural and Falfurrias, the county seat, is the largest town in the county with a population of 6,177.*

Using data collected on families from these two study locations, an attempt will be made to:

- 1) Examine the effects of place of residence on self-defined satisfactions with aspects of the local community, and
- 2) Explore age status differences among family members regarding community satisfaction.

The Larger Study Focus - Quality of Life As Influenced By Place of Residence

Data reported here are part of NC-128 research, "Quality of Life As Affected by Place of Residence," a cooperative project of social scientists in fourteen states representing numerous academic disciplines. The project's basic premise is that quality of life is the product of a multitude of life conditions and the individual's perception of them (Metzen et. al., 1980). Several of the states participating in the larger study sampled

*1980 U. S. Census preliminary figure.

Mexican American populations.

Methodology

The primary questionnaire was developed for use in all participating states with Spanish translation of the instrument available for use in states sampling Mexican Americans. Items selected for use in the present study focus on respondent satisfaction with community services, place of residence preferences, and family life.

The Texas Mexican American sample includes 172 families. Complete family study units consisted of interviews with the husband, wife and at least one child. 138 families were classified as complete. Of the 172 families, 99 were sampled in the Brownsville Southmost area representing metropolitan place of residence and 73 families were selected in Brooks County communities representing nonmetropolitan residence. Data reported in this paper includes both the metropolitan and nonmetropolitan segments of the Texas Mexican American sample and excluding 11 families interviewed and studied as "special cases" in Brooks County. Intensively trained indigenous, bilingual people conducted the interviews. Several bilingual students from Texas A&M University supplemented the interviewer work force. All interviews with adults were face-to-face, personal contacts, while youth interviews were self-administered and picked up a few days later. Fewer than 10% of the qualified families refused an interview.

There are several limitations of this study that limit the ability to generalize the findings to all families in Brooks County. One is based on the requirements of the larger regional study to which this survey contributes which led to the selection of a particular kind of family for study as follows:

- (1) Both parents had to be living in the household.
- (2) At least one teen-ager had to be in the household.
- (3) One parent had to be Mexican American.

As a consequence the survey focuses on what might be labeled, "Complete Mexican American Families" (Kuvlesky and Ballard, 1981:3).

Table 1. Number of Subjects Interviewed by Study Area, Age Status, and Gender.

	<u>Metro</u>			<u>Nonmetro*</u>			<u>TOTAL</u>		
	<u>(Cameron County)</u>			<u>(Brooks County)</u>					
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Fem.</u>	<u>Tot.</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Fem.</u>	<u>Tot.</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Fem.</u>	<u>Tot.</u>
<u>Adults</u> <u>(Parents)</u>	90	99	189	58	61	119	148	160	308
<u>Youth</u> <u>(Children)</u>	40	49	89	38	16	54	78	65	143
Families			99			62			161

* This count excludes families interviewed as "special cases" purposively selected as female-headed household and "influentials". From these "special cases" we interviewed 11 mothers, 5 fathers, and 10 teenagers.

Characteristics of Study Families By Place of Residence

Table 2 presents a summarized listing of data on study family characteristics. Similarities can be noted among metro and nonmetro family members regarding age and job types. But important differences are revealed on other features, especially income and education figures. Despite nonmetro resident's higher average level of education and lower average family size, a highly significant income gap exists between metro and nonmetro residents. This clearly reflects the economic disadvantage that nonmetro residents experience. Metro households are larger on average, family members have less education, and are slightly more likely to hold blue collar type jobs, yet on average have incomes nearly \$4,000 higher than nonmetro families.

Table 2. Summary Overview of Subject Characteristics by Place of Residence.

A) <u>Adult</u> <u>Characteristics</u>	Metro (Cameron County)	Nonmetro (Brooks County)
Age (Average Years)	45.5	44
Formal Education (Average Years)	5.8	7.5
Unemployment (%)	25.4	28.3
Blue Collar Jobs (%)	58.2	48.5
White Collar Jobs (%)	13.8	17.8
Born in County of current residence or nearby county (%)	39.9	90.0
B) <u>Youth</u> <u>Characteristics</u>		
Age (Average Years)	16.0	14.8
C) <u>Household</u> <u>Characteristics</u>		
Size (No. of People)	7	5.5
Family Income (Average \$)	14,025	10,540

Community and Public Services (Tables 3 and 4)

Study families were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the local community in general, and how satisfied they were with various public services. A comparison of adult and youth responses by metro and nonmetro study sites is presented in the tables which follow. Generational differences are described for each study site, then an overall metro/non-metro comparison is made and finally, there will be an examination of age status variations without reference to place of residence.

Metro

As indicated in Tables 3 and 4, metro adults were consistently more satisfied than youth with the local community and public services. The extent of variation between adult and youth satisfaction was greatest in terms of their overall assessment of the local community where nearly all adults expressed strong satisfaction, compared to just over two-thirds for youth.

Nonmetro

The pattern of satisfaction differences between metro adults and youth exists for nonmetro residents as well with the exception that the extent of the variation between nonmetro adults and youth is substantially greater. Non-metro youth are significantly less satisfied than adults especially with the local community and with the extent of their satisfaction with religious activities. Nonmetro adults are generally well satisfied, but find transportation and recreation for adults and youth less than satisfactory. Over half of the nonmetro youth were dissatisfied with youth recreation opportunities.

Metro - Nonmetro Comparisons

Generational variation was greater for nonmetro residents than metro family members. Adults expressed consistently stronger satisfaction with

Table 3. Strongly Satisfied With Community/Public Services.*

	<u>Metro</u>			-----% Strongly----- Satisfied	<u>Nonmetro</u>		
	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>		<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>
Community (general)	91	70	-19		89	56	-33
Religious Activities	88	73	-15		82	48	-34
Schools	74	66	- 8		78	60	-18
Police and Fire Protection	72	61	-11		68	54	-14
Transportation	60	53	- 7		44	37	- 7
Adult Recreation	64	N/A	---		43	N/A	---
Youth Recreation	69	62	- 7		44	26	-18
Health Care	68	N/A	---		68	N/A	---

* The "Strongly Satisfied" classification includes "strongly satisfied" and "satisfied" response categories.

Table 4. Dissatisfied to Any Extent With Community/Public Services.*

	<u>Metro</u>			<u>Nonmetro</u>		
	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>
Community (general)	4	17	+13	4	30	+26
Religious Activities	5	17	+12	13	28	+15
Schools	18	17	- 1	13	26	+13
Police and Fire Protection	20	25	+ 5	18	30	+12
Transportation	20	27	+ 7	41	48	+ 7
Adult Recreation	19	N/A	---	38	N/A	---
Youth Recreation	16	11	- 5	42	56	+14
Health Care	21	N/A	---	33	N/A	---

* The "Dissatisfied to Any Extent" classification includes "strongly dissatisfied," "dissatisfied," "somewhat dissatisfied," and "mixed" response categories.

community and public services than did youth. Rural youth were generally less satisfied than urban youth.

Overall, metro family members were more satisfied than nonmetro residents. Nonmetropolitan differences relate to the economic disadvantages perceived by rural residents and reflected in the delivery of public services there. Nearly one-third of nonmetro youth were dissatisfied with their local place of residence.

Community Social Climate and Family Economic Satisfactions (Tables 5 & 6)

Family members were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with social relationships in the community, such as privacy, crime, and energy conservation. Several general community economic issues also were included as items in the survey instrument concerning local housing and employment opportunities.

Metro

Most adults were satisfied with social and economic community conditions, but employment opportunities, housing and crime were items on which subjects expressed less satisfaction. Metro youth were clearly less satisfied than adults with employment opportunities and crime being the focus of their dissatisfaction. There were substantial differences between adults and youth in the extent of their satisfaction with perceived freedom from crime, efforts to save energy, and the general cohesiveness of local people to work together.

Nonmetro

Rural adults were satisfied to a larger extent than youth on every item asked. Adults were well satisfied with the social make up of the community

Table 5. Strongly Satisfied With Social Climate and Economic Aspects of Place of Residence.

<u>Social Climate</u>	<u>Metro</u>			-----% Strongly Satisfied-----	<u>Nonmetro</u>		
	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>		<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>
Family Privacy	87	69	-18		91	52	-39
Moral Standards	76	58	-18		82	62	-20
Freedom From Crime	55	26	-29		76	54	-22
Cooperation of People	77	58	-19		65	43	-22
Community's Ethnic/Racial Mix	88	70	-18		93	71	-22
School's Ethnic/Racial Mix	91	73	-18		94	78	-16
Energy Conservation	80	60	-20		74	45	-29
<u>Economic Aspects</u>							
Community Stores	80	79	- 1		65	50	-15
Housing	50	N/A	---		46	N/A	---
Employment Opportunities	44	42	- 2		32	22	-10

Table 6. Dissatisfied To Any Extent With Social Climate and Economic Aspects of Place of Residence.

<u>Social Climate</u>	<u>Metro</u>			-----% Dissatisfied-----	<u>Nonmetro</u>		
	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>		<u>Adults</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>% Diff.</u>
Family Privacy	5	19	+14		8	17	+ 9
Moral Standards	15	20	+ 5		10	9	- 1
Freedom From Crime	39	33	- 6		14	34	+20
Cooperation of People	15	19	+ 4		18	19	+ 1
Community's Ethnic/Racial Mix	9	17	+ 8		3	15	+12
School's Ethnic/Racial Mix	5	16	+11		0	4	+ 4
Energy Conservation	12	28	+16		8	32	+24
<u>Economic Aspects</u>							
Community Stores	13	11	- 2		19	30	+11
Housing	29	N/A	---		44	N/A	---
Employment Opportunities	46	42	- 4		57	71	+14

but expressed strong dissatisfaction with economic aspects, including employment opportunities, housing, and retail stores. Youth differed from adults in the extent of their satisfaction with social and economic aspects of the local community. This was particularly so for family privacy, where youth are far less satisfied. Nearly three-quarters of rural youth feel dissatisfied about job opportunities.

Metro and Nonmetro Comparisons

Generally, adults were more satisfied than youth, without reference to place of residence. Youths' dissatisfaction was focused on job opportunities and crime. Generational variation was much wider among nonmetro family members and this was indicated by marked differences in perceptions concerning family privacy.

Nonmetro residents were less satisfied with local stores and efforts to save energy than were metro residents. Metro families expressed stronger dissatisfaction with crime in their local community. Study family members in both residence locations were dissatisfied with housing and job opportunities.

Place of Residence Preferences (Table 7)

Place of residence seems to be a key factor in perceived community satisfactions. Subjects were asked to indicate their choice of residence locations by size of place and distance to metropolitan center. Adults were also asked about their plans to move to a new location.

Metro

Metro adults prefer to live in medium to very small towns, while youth generally choose medium to very large cities. Less than one-third of all metro family members expressed a desire to live in a metropolitan inner-city, and most adults and youth prefer not to live in, but near a metropolitan area. Given the indication that over one-third of metro adults would

Table 7. Place of Residence Preferences: Metro - Nonmetro and Age Status Comparisons.

A. <u>Size of Community Preferred</u>	<u>Metro</u>		<u>Nonmetro</u>	
	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Youth</u>
	----- % -----			
Farm or Open Country	37	22	59	41
Very Small Town (less than 1,000)	7	0	16	4
Small Town or City (1,000 - 9,999)	11	10	14	19
Medium Size City (10,000 - 49,999)	29	30	7	32
Large City (50,000 - 99,999)	11	20	0	2
Very Large City (100,000 +)	3	16	0	2
No Information	1	1	5	1
TOTAL	99	99	101	101
B. <u>Location of Preferred Residence</u>				
In a Metro Center	27	23	3	17
Near a Metro Center	40	58	44	35
Not Near a Metro Center	30	11	49	37
No Information	4	8	5	11
TOTAL	101	100	101	100
C. <u>Plans To Move To A New Community In The Next Five Years</u>				
No	74	DOES	72	DOES
Don't Know	9	NOT	8	NOT
Yes	15	APPLY	1	APPLY
No Information	1		19	

rather live in farm or open country communities it is not surprising that a substantial number plan to move soon.

Nonmetro

Youth in rural communities were more likely to choose an urban residence location than were adults. Most nonmetro family members, however, choose to live in very small cities or towns, which reflects their current place of residence. There are virtually no plans to move among adults surveyed in the nonmetro segment of the study. About half of the nonmetro respondents prefer to live close to a metro center and about half choose to live away from a metro center.

Metro and Nonmetro Comparisons

While most nonmetro residents prefer to live in places similar to their current place of residence, the same cannot be said of metro residents. Over half of metro adults want to live in communities much smaller than their current place of residence and some plan to move in the near future.

Final Overview and Summary

Adults were more satisfied than youth for the community satisfaction questions addressed here. This pattern generally held for both metro and nonmetro residents. Strong satisfactions with various aspects of the community were patterned by age status as well, with adults much more likely than youth to express strong feelings of satisfaction. Generational differences were further indicated in desired size of place preferences with youth having a greater desire for urban living, while adults chose rural residence locations.

An interesting pattern emerged concerning preferred residence location. Metro adults did not, in a general sense, find their current place of residence to be the size of place they desire, whereas rural adults preferred a rural place of residence, reflecting their current residence.

Most aspects of the local community were perceived in a positive or satisfactory manner. Recreational opportunities, jobs, housing, and crime were the focus of some dissatisfaction and typically were considered a problem by metro and nonmetro family members.

To understand more fully minority relationships and how place of residence and generational differences affect inter and intra group relations, we will need to develop clearer, more precise notions of how minority group members conceive, perceive, and evaluate these things. This paper has been an attempt to further our understanding of such perceptions, using the recent self-defined reports of family members in Brooks County. Simplistic notions or generalized assumptions about place of residence or generational variation among these groups does not adequately relate to the complexity and dissimilarity which exists in local communities. As Kuvlesky (1979:35) so aptly remarks, "Expect diversity on all fronts and you won't be misguided from the start!"

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